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AUTHOR Nicodemus, Robert
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ABSTRACT

This report describes how knowledge and skills learned in the Tavistock "Observation" course were applied to psychodynamic focused consultancy in England's Open University. Questions raised include the therapeutic and educational impact institutions may have on staff. The report explains how the Observational Course was important in supporting the development of Institute of Educational Technology activities with a psychodynamic perspective, i.e., consultancy on group processes, team work facilitation, individual work counseling, studies on the impact of technological change on work, and research on learning in groups. The report also contains information on seven Tavistock courses that are particularly relevant to education, some as part of degree programs, and where they are available. The last section of the report, "Perspectives from the Consulting to Institutions Workshop", provides an example of support which may be needed in any psychodynamic focused enquiry or consultancy. Contains 28 references. (GLR)

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# The Tavistock observation course: implications for distance education

by Robert Nicodemus

NE 025 624

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Institute of Educational Technology
The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA

The Open University

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2. To maintain a knowledge base for the above activities by helping to research problems in the OU learning system and by recording experience in course teams and on committees, and also to encourage innovatory solutions and practices.

3. To provide consultancy and training, inside the OU and on a contract basis with outside organisations, based on the staff's wide experience in distance education and open learning. On this same basis, to chair course teams and write course materials, and to 'transform' materials produced by external contributors into high quality distance teaching material.

## FOREWORD

This report is based on three papers written for The Tavistock Gazette - house journal of the Tavistock Clinic. Gazette readership includes staff from the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and the Tavistock Institute of Marital Studies (all located at 120 Belsize Lane, London NW3 ) Described is how knowledge and skills learned in the Tavistock 'Observation' course were applied to psychodynamic focused consultancy in the Open University. Questions raised include the impact therapeutic and educational institutions may have on staff.

# THE TAVISTOCK OBSERVATION COURSE: IMPLICATIONS FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

## Introduction

Three papers in this report were written for publication in The Tavistock Gazette - 'Reflections on a Tavistock training', 'Individual and institutional growth', 'Therapeutic and educational institutions'. In the papers I describe how I applied what I learned in the Tavistock 'Observation' course to consultancy with individual staff and teams in the Open University (OU). Brief examples of consultancy offered through the OU's Institute of Educational Technology (IET), where I am based, may inform as well as encourage reflection about how different kinds of institutions can affect relationships and communication between staff.

The three papers are included in this TCC report for OU staff for information rather than explanation of psychoanalytic concepts. There are two sections here not included in the Gazette papers. In the first, seven Tavistock courses particularly relevant to education are mentioned and where they are available, some as part of degree programmes. The last section, 'Perspectives from the consulting to institutions workshop', gives an example of support which may be needed in any psychodynamic focused enquiry or consultancy.

### Comments by OU staff

I include some comments from three OU colleagues about the draft of this report which reflects how seriously dynamics within course teams are viewed as well as the need for more description. The chair of a course wrote - "I thought there was some really good stuff in the paper struggling to get out but its all so disguised and oblique that it loses track of its goodness...There is a very strong sense of secret knowledge locked away". A course manager wrote - "we agree in seeing it having great potential but needing some hard case examples...Do keep at it. Its fascinating stuff. But it would be so nice to get to grips with some real human beings in real situations". A course team member wrote - "I have the sense of being on the verge of understanding some of the things that go on in the OU but this stops short at a tantalizing point which makes me want to say 'so what'?...Your comments on course

team dynamics, staff members anxieties about the system and difficulties of reflection in a situation of pressure all resonate with me strongly. How can course teams and new staff at the OU be helped with these issues in a practical way.? At the moment for me, after one year working here, it feels as though each new person and new team has to launch into apparently uncharted territory of group and organizational dynamics."

Some of these issues are taken up in TCC report No 62 "Understanding course teams: organization and dynamics".

**Tavistock courses**

The 'Observation Course' is one of sixty courses and training programmes offered by the Tavistock Clinic in London. The full title of the course is 'Observational studies and the application of psychoanalytic concepts to work with children young people and families'. At present, fifty places are available each year and study requires at least 15 hours weekly for two years, although this may be spread out over a longer time. The course can lead to a Postgraduate Diploma in 'Psychoanalytic Observational Studies' from the Polytechnic of East London Department of Sociology or an MA with two additional terms of study. Registration for an MPhil or PhD is also available. Higher degrees by research can also be taken at Brunel University Departments of Human Sciences and Government.

With satisfactory completion of the Observation Course students may take an 'Advanced course in the application of psychoanalytic concepts to personality development and interaction'. In addition, about 15 students are admitted each year to a clinical training programme leading to qualification as a child psychotherapist, recognized by the NHS for work with children and families. The Observation Course is also offered in Bristol, Birmingham and Leeds. Details are in the prospectus issued in October by the Training Office, Tavistock Clinic, 120 Belsize Lane, London NW3 5BA (071 794 7424).

Other Tavistock courses relevant to those in education include - 'Training in educational psychology', 'Counselling aspects in education part 1: emotional factors in the learning and teaching relationship', 'part 2: dynamics of educational institutions and groups', 'Growing up in a multi-ethnic society', 'Understanding and management of working groups in a time of change', 'A

systems approach to change in families, work groups and organizations', 'Working with systems: the family and the school'

This report shows how the Observation Course was important in supporting the development of IET activities with a psychodynamic perspective, i.e. consultancy on group processes, team work facilitation, individual work counselling, studies on the impact of technological change on work and research on learning in groups. I was a student in the Observation course from 1978-1983 and continued my association with the Clinic as a member of the 'Consulting to institutions workshop' - one of a number of interdisciplinary activities available. I have also learned from contacts with staff in the TIMS and TIHR. The Tavistock Institute of Marital Studies also offers courses relevant to those in education and the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations supports a wide variety of activities including consultancy to groups and institutions.

In this report I relate some of my work in the Open University to the Observation Course with particular reference to three papers by Martha Harris who was organizing tutor at the Tavistock Clinic until her accidental death in 1987. Sheila Miller (1991) writes how Matti "made the imaginative leap of changing the pre-clinical part of the Child Psychotherapy training into a separate entity catering both for workers wishing to stay in their own profession as well as for those intending to train as child psycho-therapists". (p. 5)

Small group seminars provide the main training activities in the Observation Course and include work study, infant observation, young child observation, psychoanalytic theory, research in child development, personality development and psychoanalytic technique. Optional events include 'Aspects of social institutions' and 'The study of group behaviour in institutions' - a five day experiential event where unconscious assumptions and preconceptions within groups which interfere with work are studied. Personal psychoanalytic therapy is optional for those who do not continue into clinical training.

There are many other relevant training opportunities offered by other institutions and these are considered in a separate TCC report No. 61 "Consulting to groups and institutions: Theory and training". The

commitment in the Tavistock Clinic to consultancy work in institutions makes their training of particular relevance to institutional research and development activities generally.

**Reflections on a Tavistock training**

*Two institutions*

Not all students in the Tavistock Observation Course are expected to continue into clinical training in child psychotherapy. Fortunately, a Tavistock tutor who was familiar with the OU, appreciated the potential relevance of the course to my interest in learning about psychoanalytic theory and method and how it might be applied to groups. My interest had been aroused by a TIHR report on the experience of working with OU course teams. (Lawerence, 1979) I had initiated the report because of my personal experiences in course teams during the previous four years.(Nicodemus, 1979, 1982)

Initially, I did not see how observing babies was relevant to adults working in teams but it was not long before I started to apply my Tavistock experiences, some quite uncomfortable, to the development and presentation of distance education materials and the systems supporting these activities. Because IET conducts institutional research, development and training, I was ideally placed for psychodynamic focused work which has now involved hundreds of OU staff.

Matti Harris in "The Tavistock training and philosophy" (1977) describes a consensus at the Tavistock about promoting "healthy growth in the individual, the family and society. In this aim we pay attention not only to illness but also to the conditions which seem to permit developmental change". (p. 293) Although my focus is on the educational implications of a Tavistock approach, the fear of illness, the irrational and the unconscious has required years to come to terms with, personally as well as for some colleagues at work.

*Developing work and self*

Over the past eleven years the focus of my work has gradually shifted and may be summarized along the following areas - 1. consulting to course teams on unconscious processes in meetings 2. individual work counselling 3. consulting in summer schools on the impact of the institution on learning 4.

conducting an enquiry into the impact of computer technology (resource planning, electronic publishing) on staff 5. applying Tavistock ideas to staff training 6. developing materials about learning in groups 7. contribution of a psychoanalytic perspective to an OU correspondence text. The shift in my work is toward more distant or long term aspects of a distance education environment e.g. how those separate from the OU centre in Milton Keynes become integrated within an environment where separation and differentiation in relationships is such a basic feature. The management of boundaries which integrate more complex and interdependent tasks in the OU system is a primary challenge for teams producing courses, as it is also for individuals in a group relations conference. Most development occurs unconsciously - unobserved or not understood.

*Facilitating teams and their work*

About three years ago the OU's Centre for Mathematics Education, hearing about my work, asked me to facilitate their work as a team. After about a year this led to my evaluation of their videos of classroom behaviour in an old course. I was then invited to write the 'Broadcast notes' for a new course in mathematics education which uses six hours of video material from classrooms. At the time I do not think any of us realized how the the videos could be used for teaching about unconscious processes in learning. The interest of the Centre staff and their commitment to experiences we had shared were invaluable to clarifying my own ideas and extending them to the course materials. I have found it difficult to bring group experiences to life in print. Combined with the problem of finding places to publish such work, most of my writing remains unpublished but I expect this to change soon. There is now a substantial section on "psycho-analytic perspectives" in the review unit of Learning and Teaching Mathematics. (Shiu, 1992) We are also looking into the possible development of a pack to teach about learning in groups using OU videos and broadcasts from other courses.

'Work study seminars' are a component of the Observation Course which influenced my approach in working with teams in the OU. Re-reading Matti's (1977) article I am struck at how closely I have adapted what she describes - students are encouraged to make use of their own feelings "recognizing that these are a valuable part of imaginative perception without which any relationship and any attitude to work is two-dimensional" (p. 295)

One of my functions in course teams has been to provide a safe place for reflecting on emotional experiences and their sources. When I do intervene in a meeting, it is often to draw attention to how anxieties about relationships at a distance may be resolved through those available in the team. Difficulties attributed to personality may then be understood in terms of the institutional environment. Inappropriate emotions may then be clarified and the dynamics within the team altered, as they are always when an intervention is made. Some teams take on the responsibility of 'process commenting' themselves, something that should become a convention making "facilitators" unnecessary. I have described such work in more detail elsewhere. (Nicodemus, 1983,1984)

*Receptive observation - inside and outside*

Matti describes the two year 'mother-infant observation seminar' as the most valuable component in the course. Becoming a receptive observer and refraining from active involvement is a particular discipline which makes one very aware of the mind/body boundary. "At a distance one baby ( or one person ) is much like any other" writes Matti. (p. 298) Soon after beginning my weekly observations of a mother with her infant, the whole family became increasingly affected by the jealous rage of the two year-old sibling. At feeding time everyone seemed to go to sleep, with depression possibly functioning as a buffer against the alarming emotions. At other times the infant had to be placed in the play-pen for protection from the two year old. The notes I wrote up afterward became increasing brief but the seminar brought me back in touch with my own anxieties. Within two months I asked my tutor, Matti, about entering analysis to help me work through the difficulties I was experiencing, a journey which was to take seven years to complete.

Although I had over-identified with the vulnerability of the infant, she appeared to be quite robust. Also, early on in the Observation Course I had found reading Melanie Klein quite painful. Though my own analysis and the experiences of the Tavistock seminars I found that "a capacity to form object relations grows in the child through recurrent experiences of being understood". (p. 299) Matti raises a question about the link between mother-baby observation and a work situation. In a distance teaching environment the link between the system and the dependent student is complex. The conventional teacher-learner relationship is replaced by a triad with a part-

time tutor mediating between the institution and the student. The part-time tutor functions in a way like a foster parent in supporting the needs of the student. With the increasing development of OU learning 'packs' for sale outside the support system, one colleagues observed there will be "a lot of orphans out there".

There are other potential foster parents such as the full-time OU Senior Counsellors who sort out problems with the institution. Some of these problems arise from the necessity of maintaining schedules, deadlines for sending in assignments as well as the high expectations inherent in an academic discipline. Ambivalent feelings toward the OU are accentuated by the separation of the learner at a distance. Some students oscillate between idealization and denigration of the OU, but such polarization appears to be worked through in the summer schools. After this intense one week residential experience a student may be better able to organize study with less impact on relationships in their family.

*Education and treatment*

Ambivalent feelings may be focused on IET, a place associated with both support and demands - i.e. technological aspects of a system designed to facilitate work and learning combined with research on problems. Looking back on this situation I wonder about my gravitation towards the Open University as well as the Tavistock Clinic - one providing a working environment where anxieties about separation would be provoked and the other providing a teaching environment which would help confront, clarify and resolve such anxieties. Identifying how aspects of these two kinds of institutions could be brought together might have many advantages i.e. one able to reach a large audience and the other providing a safe environment for self development at a deep emotional level.

Matti warns about the tendency to find fault in situations, an urge to find psychopathology in everything as if the tensions in learning were an illness needing treatment or immunization. On-going membership of a group which takes emotions and the unconscious seriously is important if one is to work in a healthy way with institutions. Although my association with the Tavistock as a student had to end, I was again fortunate in being able to join the 'Consulting to institutions workshop' convened by Dr. Anton Obholzer and this report is one consequence of this contact. The workshop has help me

to learn from my consultancy work inside the OU and in other institutions (Civil Service, National Health Service). Institutions are not always ready for a consultancy informed by the theories and skills of the Observation Course. But the consultancies and enquiries that many of us in the OU have been able to pursue, especially over the past thirteen years, suggests that the idea of openness in the OU refers to more than just opportunity and technology. At first such work was difficult to sustain because of hostile reactions. Although it is more valued now, being heard can still be a problem.

**Individual and institutional growth**

*Containment of meaning*

When I joined the OU in 1974 it had barely survived a politically conflicted beginning five years earlier. It was still too early to say what long term growth would mean to institutional awareness about the function of anxiety in learning and team development. By the time of our 21st birthday in 1990, there was more understanding about the relationship between individual and institutional learning e.g. how the containment of anxiety is related to creativity. The relationship of 'container and contained' was first proposed by Bion (1962 ) and is clearly described in a paper by Dr. Ron Britton (1992). I will also draw upon a paper by Matti Harris (1981) in considering how learning and growth can be described as a transformation of experience through a process of containment. A 'container' gives shape and secure boundaries - a context. The 'contained' gives meaning to the context. An academic discipline such as mathematics may be seen as a 'container', the skills, symbols and concepts which help shape relationships. The teacher-learner relationship gives significance and meaning through the dynamic aspects which are 'contained'. Why is this rather abstract idea of 'container-contained' important? Because it may be applied to a wide diversity of related experiences and provide more perspectives into how the dynamic interaction between individuals and institution can lead to development - i.e. transformation of the container-contained relationship.

*Support from a distance*

Considerable efforts are made in IET to specify what we have to offer to the OU, in negotiating with other departments about what they want and keeping records about what we do year by year. It has proved more difficult to compare what people plan to do and what they actually do and as well as clearly representing to the OU what IET adds up to collectively. From the beginning of the OU in 1969, IET efforts have focused on technological aspects of course presentation and using large scale questionnaires to identify problems e.g. student's use of various components of the teaching system - correspondence texts, kits, video-cassettes, broadcasts and face to face tutorials (in large population courses). IET staff take our knowledge and experiences, as well as statistics, into course teams to help improve courses. We try to bridge a time and space gap, applying the evaluation of old courses in the production of new courses. The difficulties of doing this requires looking internally into our own needs but the skills and commitment to do this have been only slowly developed. Individuals who work with course teams do have private understandings about boundary difficulties ( between individuals and other teams in the system ) but these are rarely shared in a way which could contribute to a collective identity i.e. through 'work study seminars'.

Recognition of the importance of supporting student is seen in two areas - (a) Course development and presentation - teams and multimedia systems and (b) staff development - particularly, the advice and briefings given to part-time tutors. A centrally based department, Regional Academic Services (RAS) supports an active programme of briefing and training for tutors as well as staff based in the Regional Centres - thirteen in total. These support activities (or enquiries into them) are relatively invisible to most OU staff as they are directed to specific groups and are rarely written about or published. Lack of knowledge about the variety of support activities may contribute to neglect of staff needs and awareness of the potential usefulness of organized discussions which focus on emotional and unconscious aspects of work relationships. Over the past thirteen years I have presented forty-nine seminars and workshops, all with a psychodynamic focus, but it is impossible to measure their effect. Finding an effective role has been a very slow process.

Students faced with all the knowledge they do not know when they begin OU study may also have doubts about their ability, as well as identity, and the relevance of their experience for success. Some may find this very

stimulating. Staff working in an environment which lacks knowledge about the impact of relationships on work and study (as well as the efforts which do exist to help tutors and students) may remain unconcerned about the impact of unconscious process. When I offered a seminar on course team dynamics to our new Centre for Modern Languages, there was surprise about how common the problems are they were encountering in their first few months of work. Through the seminar they realized that many difficulties in the system were due more to the processes found in any institution than to their inexperience. One consequence was a clearer idea about what demands they could make on the system rather than worry about demands the system made on them.

*Learning and emotions*

Confusing IET's rational plans is the dynamic process of 'transference' where emotions from past relationships are acted out in present relationships. Re-enactment of unresolved anxieties appears to be accentuated in a distance education environment, especially where ideals about innovativeness and correcting social injustice are involved. We have considerable evidence now about the impact of OU study on some student's lives, at work as well as in their families. Resolving anxieties about their own capabilities, learning to contain positive and negative projections through a more realistic perception of self (and the institution) is a journey assisted particularly by attending summer schools. It is more difficult to write about the impact on staff lives when doing consultancy and work counselling from within and preserve confidentiality as well. What little I have been able to write has been agreed with those involved or based on public events observed by many.

Over the past twenty-three years there have been periodic calls for abolishing IET to help solve the inevitable financial crises. Although this has not done much for a secure collective identity, these attacks have encouraged our collection and publication of information about the work we do e.g. an ambitious series of books about distance education recently agreed with a publisher. Also, IET colleagues who we had not seen much of for some time have become more active in management and working with others. With more secure beliefs in the skills and knowledge on offer, IET is functioning as a better 'container' of anxieties about learning and teaching at a distance with the result that individual skills are contained and applied to the system.

*Acceptance of the unconscious*

When I joined the OU in 1974 there seemed to be few safe places for honest public discussion of one's work experiences in depth and applying this to understanding the impact of the institution on teams as well as individuals. I gradually became aware that I was not isolated in experiencing a number of difficulties such as - (a) poor planning or difficulties in anticipating what needs to be done when (b) little recognition or celebration of when work is finally completed (c) no reflection on the consequence of one's work, effectiveness or quality (d) no strategic plan for work . In 1978 I gathered a small group of six colleagues together to try collectively to improve our skills for working in groups. This initiated a diversity of activities that still continue, although only two of the six still work in IET. Two have died and one has left the OU.

Matti Harris writes that, as an establishment begins to meet with success it is hard "to bear in mind that they may not know the right direction, that there might not be a right direction without being formless and disintegrated". (p. 344) In 1979 it was difficult to carry on a meaningful discourse about unconscious process, anxiety and pain in the OU. Thirteen years later these topics are increasingly being applied to a variety of tasks such as the development of course materials, research and staff training.

*Dynamic sources of creativity in courses*

The use of videos in Learning and Teaching Mathematics reflects what Matti Harris wrote about observation of the baby-mother couple until some "pattern emerges which speaks for itself". (p. 326) The observers refrain from imposing some theoretical framework, following what Bion describes as the 'suspension of memory and desire' or having an experience of becoming rather than just learning about something. In the course for mathematics teachers there is a clear distinction between giving an "account of" and an "account for" in an effort to encourage accurate observation of details which might support more hypotheses about what is happening to the learner. Also addressed is the idea of observing one's own emotions and projection as a form of communication. The teacher is made to feel what the learner is experiencing and this, as Ron Britton (1992) points out, can be seen as a normal stage of development - a primitive forerunner of thinking.

Some OU staff treat schedules for course production as a fantasy, that it has no reality because schedules are made for slipping. This reflects some of the ambiguity in the system, that people do take opportunities to contribute something to a course which was not planned or anticipated. Some of the creativity in teams seems to derive from 'reparation' for the destructive aspects of the process. Converting what is a reality into a fantasy can also a defense against anxieties about the process, especially the consequences of learning at a distance. Some students join the OU with idealistic expectations which are unconsciously and powerfully communicated to staff.

In addition to what we bring personally into a work situation, aspects of the work situation can have powerful effects on personal lives. Individual work counselling has revealed considerable details of the impact of work on personal relationships. e.g. two staff members took so much work home they had no leisure time. The intrusion, which appeared to be self imposed, began to affect their marriage. But to what extent was their inability to manage their work related to anxieties about the system, particularly changes which appear to affect most large institutions? e.g. the replacement of personal ways of organizing resources by computer based systems, the lack of feed-back when relating to people at a distance, the loss of social skills at points of tension in meetings and the failure to use these experiences for institutional learning.

*Owning responsibility*

Often it is difficult to tell what influence one's work may have. I have become more cautious about searching for a psychodynamic based conflict theory in OU courses. One academic wrote that I was in danger of seeming be "charting a deliberate conspiracy" in pointing to the absence of relevant literature in course materials. In his opinion I could continue to be most effective through my work with individuals and teams. But I have continued to encourage colleagues in a variety of disciplines to broaden the view of what 'openness' and 'reflective practice' means - particularly to include the negative and unconscious aspects of behaviour.

I would like to give one further example about how individual work counselling can support work by clarifying the impact of the past on the present. One colleague was having difficulty organizing work, bringing all the different tasks together in an effective way. He associated some of his feelings to those about his parental home where his parents lived apart. The ground

floor between them symbolized a 'space where nothing happened'. All the hopes and fears were located in the basement or top floor. This internal picture became gradually transformed through the work counselling relationship into one where differences came together on the ground floor - creatively rather than destructively.

The idea of containment in a space 'between' things is a symbol for institutional as well as individual growth. In the OU, course teams work on a symbolic 'ground floor' where all aspect of the system are brought together - students at a distance, colleagues one is dependent on and unconscious processes in a symbolic 'basement', illuminated by a window on understanding from the top floor. Faced with the attraction of ideology as well as ideals in distance education, it is best to keep in mind what Matti wrote that it is "difficult enough to become the person one is without positive encouragement from the establishment towards conformity and deception". (p. 327) Education can have some therapeutic implications for workers as well as learners.

**Therapeutic and educational institutions**

*Educational environments*

Most distance teaching institutions, in contrast to the OU, have full-time degree students present on campus as well as those studying at a distance. Except for a handful of full-time post-graduates at the OU centre in Milton Keynes, all the 81,000 degree students are part-time and study mainly from home (there are 135 undergraduate courses to choose from). An additional 36,000 people enrol in one of 250 non-degree courses. A complex multi-media system with a technological emphasis partly compensates for the separation of OU students. It is complimented by counselling as part of tuition. In their counselling role, part-time tutors (over 5000 in number) evaluate what Matti Harris (1987) describes as the <u>state</u> as well as the <u>stage</u> of the learner. For example, mathematics is a subject where stages are hierarchical and specific knowledge and skills assume earlier ones. But evaluating the state of the learner depends more on the state and personality of a teacher and their sensitivity to how emotions affect study.

Differences between the OU and other distance education institutions, especially in Australia and the USA, have given rise to publications which

criticise the technological aspects of OU course presentation as well as their production. The accusation of fostering dependency or conformity also reflects concern about differences between teaching, counselling and therapy. Authority and dependency also provide a focus for communication between teams and individuals working in educational and therapeutic institutions.

*Therapeutic environments*

There is a danger in studies of how an institution can affect work. Matti Harris writes of the patronising attitude represented by "I've come across this before - when you're my age you might understand better, that this is how it should be dealt with..." (1987 p. 313) Being able to identify strongly with someone's difficulties can easily slip into offering a formula which helps avoid thinking about experiences, getting in touch with confusion and pain and being able to use one's critical or destructive capabilities in creative ways. Writing a "Guide for being a good team and team member" could underestimate individual abilities and fail to challenge growth.

Matti describes the therapeutic environment as one designed to evoke feelings in therapist and client which were originally evoked in relation to parents. The therapist has to absorb these impressions, resist impulses to action and premature ideas about directions to take. Within the protected situation, interpretations help clarify anxieties, their sources and effects on relationships and work. Counselling also helps one "look at and tolerate the anxieties connected with undescribable parts of themselves". (1987 p. 315) However the counsellor is more likely to be dealing with tangible aspects of the environment in a supportive way, in contrast to deep therapeutic interpretations which may be experienced as persecutory as well as relieving. Although a teacher needs to be aware of these processes, relationships are mediated, in part, through the disciplines being taught where progress may be identified, encouraged and rewarded. In all three roles - teacher, counsellor, therapist - there is a struggle between authority and dependence which is reflected in the tensions between institution and individual.

OU students tend to be older than those in other institutions and for some their established roles at work and in the family may be shaken up when they begin study. This is where the system is most adaptable to individual needs, through the role of part-time counselling and the full-time staff (Senior Counsellors) who deal with any problems in the system. The breadth of a

counselling role may contribute to difficulties of role identity as well as sensitivity to the lack of personal support systems in an environment where relationships are maintained at a distance.

*Technology and containment of feelings*

Although the availability of on-line computer conferences in a few courses may help reduce psychological distance for some, others cannot identify with the emotions behind the written text on the computer screen - especially with discursive and over-long contributions. Indeed, our lack of skill in using this computer resource effectively may reflect a defensive against anxieties about direct and messy contact with another vulnerable human being.

Professor Michael Rustin (1991, p. 91) describes modern social organization as one in tension between two different values - one rational, instrumental and rule bound; the other emphasising personal feeling, intuition and creative originality. The stability and creativity of distance teaching institutions is linked to their ability to contain these tensions and in the OU the course team is probably the most important place where anxieties are clarified and worked through. Resolving fears about working in a "machine-like" institution and preserving autonomy and professional responsibility is instrumental to the development of a team and its integration within a system.

*Discerning the source of feelings - inhibitions*

Matti writes that "The greatest bar to protecting oneself or people whom one loves from the many external danger situations that arise, is the difficulty in disentangling those from the other dangers deriving from one's own destructive impulses. The destructiveness from within is the one danger from which we can never escape - physically speaking it kills us all in the end - yet it is the danger when we spend much of our energy in trying to escape, to deny, to project outwards. In so far as we have to do this, it clouds our perception of ourselves and of the world. It causes us to be unduly fearful; to look for other people to blame; to take up positions of inferiority from which we can feel above reproach" (1987 p. 312)

I think Matti's perspective also accounts for some of the inhibitions about communication in any kind of institution but especially in therapeutic or distance teaching institutions. Who knows what use will be made of information? OU course teams certainly feel anxieties about what, for

example, an American co-producer may do with video materials produced in yet another partnership with the BBC. And, if our work is to live up to the expectations of everyone, at what point is it good enough to be handed over for publication, especially when so much more could be known or errors made good?

*Reflection or psychodynamics ?*

A focus on 'reflective practice' appears to be increasing in OU courses. From a 'reflective' perspective one stands back from a situation, slows down decisions and weighs up the consequences. In a recent IET conference I pointed out that in many group situations one is taken over as a sense of space, time and hope disappear. Without understanding the dynamics of this processes one may withdraw mentally from a situation, delay decisions interminably and lack any tolerance for other's difficulties. The boundaries we need for empathy, encounter and change are also a focus for anxieties about separation and differentiation. Although a group is likely to reveal a great diversity of strategies for coping, it will also support defensive behaviour e.g. projection of anxiety, escape and collusion to avoid change.

The importance of a psychodynamic perspective became more clear to me as I read draft materials from a new OU course (K 663 Roles and Relationships) which is part of the Diploma in Health and Social Welfare (HSW). The materials touch upon some difficult subjects from other HSW courses such as child abuse, ageing, death and handicap. It seemed to me that anxieties associated with these subjects were being acted out through the course materials and, probably, in the team as well although I had no direct experience of this. Tensions between academic and teaching values appear to be exaggerated in a distance education environment and are acted out through relationships within some course teams. In K 663 one course text was very theoretical in contrast to the practical emphasis of all the other materials and presented a number of problems, not the least of which was teaching about a theory which could be used. From my position outside the team, I could only guess that the difficulty of articulating and working through the pain of the kinds of topics found in HSW made it difficult to take on more anxieties associated with a psychodynamic approach. The emphasis on conflict, resistance, transference and the unconscious may seem unhelpful in a situation where one writer appeared to be against all the rest.

In addition to commenting extensively on the course materials, I shared a number of papers with the team which might help reflecting on their expereince as well as the materials - Obholzer 89, Brearly 91, Downes 88, Simmonds 88, Main 85, Lyth 88,Beaumont 91, Millar 89 and Stokes 89. Through the Tavistock 'Consulting to institutions workshop' Jon Stokes also offered to organize a 'group relations event' for OU staff in association with the Grubb Institute but this was not taken up. First presentation of K 663 was delayed two months to give more time for changes in the course in response to comments from a number of people.

*Consultancy and anxiety*

The development of an internal capability for consultancy and work counselling in IET has mobilized many anxieties in the OU. Some colleagues have been critical of my efforts to reveal and make use of my own vulnerabilities and mistakes. Others are aware that my work has supported many individuals as well as teams. In education we need to be cautious that the desire for knowledge and control do not slip into omniscience and omnipotence.

The case studies recently published by Woodhouse and Pengelly (1991) offer clear advice relevant to any institution and I have summarize some of this here - 1. Clever psychological measures may be used to deflect or ward off unconscious content 2. Procedures intended to promote task performance are customarily used to avoid anxieties that are an intrinsic component of work 3. Institutions should establish learning systems where staff are enabled to deal with what they most fear in and for themselves.

**Perspectives from the 'Consulting to institutions workshop'**

*A containing group*

To help begin psychodynamic focused consultancy, training in groups brings relevant theory and skills to life. But on-going membership in a 'containing' group is also very important. Some professional organizations may provide this but I was able to find only one place where I could take my experiences of work for discussion - the 'Consulting to institutions workshop' at the Tavistock Clinic which I have attended since it began in 1983.

Since one of my roles in IET concerns the impact of a distance education environment on work and study and sharing our understandings, it is relevant here to summarize workshop discussions about consultancy in the OU between 1981 and 1989.. This is an exception since workshop discussions are confidential.

*Observations about consultancy in the OU*

1. In-house consultants may be the most marginalized of full-time staff and your legitimate role reduced. You then have to prove your value to individuals and infiltrate the institution. You do not appear to have a legitimate or power base from which to negotiate. Consequently you work from a 'bottom-up' model mainly with the most junior staff. Your position, however, may be changing as evidenced by participating in an appointment panel for a permanent lecturer post. Control of staff selection is potentially a very powerful position.

2. You do take up the problem of power and authority in groups by attending to intergroup negotiations but only with one of the groups or units. You have no legitimacy in relation to the other groups involved. As a result, what is learned about team work does not go any further within the institution.

3. There does not appear to be any space allowed between groups to consult to intergroup processes. You cannot address this from the bottom up because you will be identified with the trouble makers below who want power by those in authority. Thus, you will be isolated. Power is usually handed down on the condition of senior staff being satisfied.

4. If you strip away the imagined constraints about power questions, you leave the situation open-ended. Can you then say what has not been or cannot be said?

5. In your exercise of power you have sought to make a difference and then withdrawn so the group could go on and exercise their own power and authority.

6. For institutional learning to occur staff have to be able to tolerate fears about how vulnerable one has to become when the answer is not known.

Thus, someone who could be a teacher is rejected because institutional learning is too painful and little space is made available to reflect on what go on in institutions. What is it that works against IET really being effective?

7. There is a sense of you being a single parent to the institution because those who might represent a maternal role are too despairing or that a paternal role is too wide a perspective to be concerned with specific individuals or groups. The lack of a symbolic parental and caring couple limits how powerful one can be. You are kept out if you are not sufficiently the same as the others.

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